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SUBJECT: A TRIP TO THE EASTERN CAPE: POSITIVE STEPS
UNDERWAY TO TURN THE PROVINCE AROUND

REF: CAPE TOWN 98

11. Summary: The Eastern Cape has the dubious reputation of being the most poorly managed province in South Africa. Nevertheless, Cape Town Consul General and Econoff found a variety of organizations and individuals in business, civil society and the government who are developing or implementing initiatives that are making a difference in the province. One such initiative involves a public/private partnership (PPP) that provides outreach programs to businesses and their employees on HIV/AIDS awareness, counselling, testing and treatment. Another non-governmental organization (NGO), set up by a former International Visitor, advocates for women and girls who are victims of violence. The Director and members of her organization recently served on a committee advising the government on the new Sexual Offences Act. Still another enterprising woman has established a community library as part of her Institute of Training and Education for Capacity Building in East London. In addition, three staff members from the Eastern Cape Director General's office discussed various initiatives that the new Eastern Cape Provincial Government plans to undertake in the education and health sectors to turn around earlier dismal performance. Finally, an Anglican priest working for the Eastern Cape AIDS Council and a Deputy Newspaper Editor talked about their respective efforts to encourage residents and other stakeholders to be more proactive in their neighborhoods. End Summary.

Siyakhana, a Public/Private Partnership, Takes HIV/AIDS Awareness to the Workplace

12. Consul General and Econoff made a series of courtesy calls to a number of individuals and organizations on a recent visit to the Eastern Cape. These individuals, who come from the business community, civil society and the government, talked about efforts and programs that seek to improve the lives of Eastern Cape residents. Siyakhana Director Dr. Simeon Odugwu spoke to Econoff on the sidelines of a breakfast meeting held by the Border-Kei Chamber of Business in East London. He indicated that DaimlerChrysler, the Border-Kei Chamber of Business (BKCOB) and German development agency DEG jointly established Siyakhana, a PPP, to provide participating small and medium-sized companies with HIV/AIDS awareness training, counselling, testing, treatment, care, support and impact mitigation. The companies pay a nominal fee to participate in the program, and the initiative is available to employees' partners/spouses and up to three children per family. Siyakhana has so far offered voluntary counselling and testing to over 7,000 employees, with 4,656 participating in the programs. 3,078 of these employees have taken HIV tests and a further 267 have been referred to treatment programs. At this time, HIV positive employees receive ARVs through a private sector treatment network owing to capacity constraints in the public health sector. However, Dr. Odugwu hopes that in the longer term, patients will be able to access similar treatment in public clinics and hospitals. Through programs like Siyakhana's, employers hope to keep HIV positive employees healthy and economically active longer, thus producing a win-win situation for everyone.

Masimanyane, an Advocate for Women and Girls

13. Masimanyane Women's Support Centre is a non-profit international women's organization located in East London. Dr. Lesley Foster, its CEO and Director, explained the work of her organization to the Consul General and Econoff during their recent visit. Established fourteen years ago, the Centre began simply as a support group for women but quickly became involved in advocacy work. Masimanyane now has nine offices and 150 volunteers who work in townships and rural areas providing educational and prevention information about violence against women and girls. The Centre is also conducting research on the effectiveness of prevention programs on violence among pre-teens and teenagers. Moreover, the organization works with area police to intervene and provide shelter to victims of violence. Dr. Foster indicated that her organization receives funding from the Scandinavian countries as well as The Netherlands and Germany. She noted, however, that although the South African government holds Masimanyane in high regard, it is still very difficult to get any type of government funding.

14. Dr. Foster philosophized that violence against women is ultimately a violation of women's human rights. The violence, she maintains, stems mainly from patriarchal and negative religious attitudes towards women. She noted that although the government had enacted legislation criminalizing violence against women, there was still a big gap between the law and reality for many women and girls. The link between the policy level and the CBO is weak. Moreover, enforcement of the law, particularly in rape cases, was still lacking in many areas, especially rural areas where the most brutal violence occurred. Dr. Foster proudly shared that she and several of her colleagues had sat on an advisory committee to the government during the drafting of the Sexual Offenses Act. Her organization also came up with the idea for the nationally observed "Sixteen Days of Activism Against Violence."

An Entrepreneur Goes the Extra Mile on Technical Training

15. Delores Athiemulam, who heads East London's Institute of Training and Education for Capacity Building (ITEC) met with the Consul General and Econoff to discuss her organization's work with disadvantaged communities. Ms. Athiemulam, a highly entrepreneurial woman and former Fulbrighter, spoke at length about her NGO, explaining that ITEC began as the first non-racial in-service training center for early childhood education in 1982. More recently, ITEC has evolved into a technical training and job resource center for disadvantaged communities. The resource center includes a community library with books, eighty-five computers and a television. Athiemulam shared that Exclusive Books, a South African on-line bookstore, had given ITEC R65,000 (USD 6,500) worth of books and paid for the library's television. ITEC has twenty-five trainers who work throughout the province.

16. Ms. Athiemulam explained that her organization now has fourteen different projects underway in different schools ranging from the primary to university level. Other projects include setting up primary education systems, establishing community libraries, computer training for adults and training for HIV/AIDS caregivers. She indicated that her computer training classes have mushroomed and have assisted graduates in finding employment. Moreover, this training has now become a source of income generation for ITEC. Athiemulam shared that her center has its own sources of funding and receives no financial support from the provincial government.

Director General's Staff Discuss New Strategies for the Province

¶7. Three staff members from the Eastern Cape Director General's office met with Consul General and Econoff on a recent trip to Bhisho. General Manager Laura Best, together with Senior Manager of International Relations & Protocol Sindiswa Mququ and General Manager of Intergovernmental Relations Nomatamba Mbete discussed several new strategies that are now being or will soon be implemented to alleviate poverty and promote economic growth in the province. Best indicated that there are two main strategies underway. The first one is an attempt to register all non-profit or small community-based organizations (NPOs/CBOs), which are providing various community services in the Eastern Cape. The provincial government aims to have a relatively complete registry of organizations in both rural and urban areas that disadvantaged communities can access for assistance. The second initiative is called the cooperative strategy where small economic or business-related entities can register as cooperatives promoting greater economic participation among small businesses and farmers. Best volunteered that the government was further along in implementing the first strategy. The second one is a newer program.

¶8. The three staff members confided that service delivery, which has been notoriously bad in the Eastern Cape, was a project management problem. Best volunteered, however, that the provincial government was beginning to implement an accelerated delivery of services initiative in health and education services. She pointed out that the previous provincial government had under funded education but quickly added that the recently appointed Premier had the political will to turn the sector around. One of the main priorities is to get rid of the remaining mud schools in the province. Another is to adequately equip all public schools with furniture, teaching materials, and textbooks as well as ensuring a safe water supply, nutrition programs and fencing for security purposes. Best continued, however, that the current inadequate supply of teachers was worrying. She said that the province was looking at bringing in teachers from other countries to fill the gap.

¶9. In the health area, Best indicated that the provincial health department intends to ensure the adequate supply of antiretroviral medication (ARVs) to public clinics and hospitals around the province. (Comment: On an earlier trip to the Eastern Cape, various CBOs indicated that in rural areas, clinics did not have ARVs. HIV positive patients had to hire transport to take them to a hospital in King Williams Town or East London to obtain the medication. For children, ARVs are only available in East London. End Comment.) Ms. Mququ interjected that she had heard about PEPFAR's work on HIV/AIDS in the province and noted that it was making a difference. She added that she hoped our grants would assist the CBO projects to become sustainable in the long term.

¶10. Best further advised that housing had become a stand-alone department in the provincial administration. She shared that the province hopes to construct 15,000 units during this fiscal year and repair many others ("rectification"), which were poorly constructed in the past. Previously, there had not been adequate quality assurance standards she added.

¶11. The Director General's staff also asked about the possibility of the U.S. Peace Corps placing volunteers in the Eastern Cape to assist in institution building. Ms. Mququ asserted that they would be very welcome. She noted that New Zealand had a number of volunteers there already. The Consul General promised to inquire about this possibility. (Comment: Econoff had asked the Peace Corps Country Director earlier about the possibility of putting volunteers in the Eastern Cape. He indicated that the Peace Corps would have to open a satellite office closer to the Eastern Cape before putting volunteers there. End Comment.)

¶12. Reverend Ntshingwa, an Anglican priest and the CEO of the Eastern Cape AIDS Council, elaborated on his organization's efforts to broaden AIDS partnerships in the province at a separate meeting with the Consul General and Econoff. He believes that the province's HIV/AIDS multi-sectoral framework plan (reported in reference cable) will promote on-the-spot intervention through door-to-door campaigns. At this time, the National Treasury is costing the plan. Once the Treasury completes this process, the province will have a donors' conference to determine what can be funded from outside donors and what the government must fund. As to provincial HIV/AIDS targets, Ntshingwa shared that the province hopes to halve the rate of new infections by 2011. Over the past year, new infections increased by 1.4 percent in the province. It also hopes to have fifty percent of HIV infected residents on ARV medication and to increase accessibility of ARVs. Ntshingwa believes access to treatment is a human right and that people have a right to adequate care.

A Young Deputy Editor's Activism

¶13. East London's Daily Dispatch Deputy Editor Bongani Siqoko concluded Consul General's and Econoff's series of meetings in the Eastern Cape. He described various initiatives underway at his newspaper. He noted that the Daily Dispatch had been the newspaper that exposed the poor conditions and care at Eastern Cape public hospitals, specifically Frere Hospital, last year. Siqoko indicated that "his" journalists are also now investigating an issue that may be bigger than the hospital scandal, but he did not elaborate. In addition to pursuing investigative reporting, Siqoko shared that he is attempting to do more public or civic journalism to engage the general public on issues like the environment and the up-coming elections. The Dispatch's periodic column on "Trash Busters" has spurred East London residents to report on illegal garbage dumps and other types of pollution. Siqoko hopes that his newspaper will also encourage voters to take more proactive positions with selected candidates up for election. Siqoko has been chosen to participate in the U.S. International Visitor Program early next year.

A Surprising Postscript

¶14. Former Buffalo City Mayor Ntombentle Peter attended U.S. Consulate General Cape Town's Community Grants certificate granting ceremony on December 4 in King Williams Town. She also gave a few words of praise and encouragement to the grantees. The Mayor confided to the Consul General during lunch that her municipality had consistently earned high marks from the National Government until the change in administrations. Afterwards, she indicated that nothing she did was right. Newspaper reports indicated that Mayor Peter, who was an Mbeki appointee, had been voted out of office on Tuesday, December 9. She was succeeded by Sakhumzi Caga.

¶15. Comment: There is no question that the Eastern Cape has a lot of catching up to do, especially with regard to promoting economic growth and enhancing service delivery. However, the people encountered during this trip appeared to have a passion for their work and programs. Even the Eastern Cape Government officials had the same passion and energy for their plans. Hopefully, provincial officials will be able to follow-through on their plans and effectively implement them. Project implementation in the Eastern Cape and in other areas of the country has often been woefully lacking. If however, improved service delivery and higher economic growth happen, perhaps civil society, the private sector and the government can together provide a better environment for Eastern Cape residents. End Comment.

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